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INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Tuesday, December 5, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Chemistry and Agricultural Engineering and the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Christmas is coming close. The letters in the week's mailbag are good evidence of that.

Here's a letter asking how to make a Christmas tree safe from fire. The letter says: "I have heard about some way to fireproof a Christmas tree. Can you tell me what this treatment is?"

I can tell you the method chemists at the Department of Agriculture developed for making a Christmas tree fire-resistant. They say to set the cut-end of the tree trunk in water containing a fire-resistant chemical. The tree drinks up the liquid and carries the chemical to every branch and even every needle.

The fire resistant chemical to use is ammonium sulphate -- the same ammonium sulphate farmers use for fertilizer. It is cheap and effective. You can buy it at any seed store and most hardware stores. Just make sure you use enough ammonium sulphate and water for the size of your tree. And make sure you allow the tree several days to drink it up.

To know how much ammonium sulphate the tree needs takes a little figuring. No use going into details here. If you are interested, just write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for complete directions for fire-proofing a Christmas tree. The directions are free.

Here's how you get the tree to take its safety drink. Cut off the trunk at an angle or in a V-shape so the tree can drink easily. Set the cut end of the trunk in a pail containing the ammonium sulphate solution. Keep the tree in a cool room

in this solution for 3 or 4 days. Don't bring the tree into a warm dry room until a large part of the liquid has been taken up. The tree can't drink so fast in warm dry air.

Here's another point. Be sure your tree is not too dried out to drink. If a tree has been cut a long time, it loses its ability to absorb liquid. Then you can't make it fire-resistant, no matter how long it stands in the chemical.

After a big enough drink of ammonium sulphate and water, a tree won't catch fire from a match or a candle or a defective electric bulb. But it will still burn if you put it on a blazing hot fire.

Once more, here's how to get complete directions for making your Christmas tree fire-resistant. Write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for directions for making a fire-resistant Christmas tree.

Even if you don't go to the trouble of making your tree fire-resistant, you'll be wise to keep it standing in water. The water it absorbs keeps it greener and fresher and prevents the needles from dropping for at least a week. Mount the tree in a tub with water in the bottom and refill as the water evaporates. Just before you set the tree in the water cut off the end of the trunk with a saw. Then the pores will be open to take up the water. By the way, spruce and fir trees hold their needles longer than most other Christmas trees.

So much for a safety-first Christmas tree. Now the second question: "Please tell me how to treat pine cones so they will give off colored lights as they burn in the fireplace, the way driftwood does."

The way to treat pine cones so they will give off color as they burn is to soak them in water containing salts like copper chloride, or lithium chloride, barium chloride and so on. Dissolve about one pound of each chemical in as little water as possible. Put the cones in a cheesecloth bag and soak some in each solution a few hours. Then spread them out on paper to dry overnight. To obtain mixed flame

colors burn cones which have been treated with different chemicals at the sametime. Don't try to dissolve the different salts in the same water. Here are the different colors you can get from different mineral salts. For red, use strontium or lithium chloride; for green, use barium chloride; for orange, use calcium chloride; for blue, use copper sulphate. (Use these chemicals with care for some are poisonous.)

By the way, a simple treatment to give pine cones an attractive glossy brown color and remove the white color of the sticky pitch on the outside is to heat them in the oven just long enough to melt the pitch.

Here's a question from a family who wants to have a Christmas celebration for the birds this year. They want suggestions for the menu for a birds' Christmas dinner. Well, Biological Survey men suggest that you can decorate the birds' Christmas tree with dried fruit, berries, and suet for a well-balanced dinner. Sunflower seed is a favorite food for blackbirds, goldfinches, crossbills, cardinals, and other small birds. You can put out the whole dried sunflower head with the seeds in it if you like. Almost any grain is a treat from pop-corn and buckwheat to wheat, rye, and barley. The little birds that have a hard time eating large hard seeds and grains have a wonderful time with crusts of bread softened with a little water and drippings or bacon fat.

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